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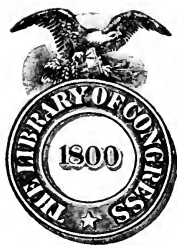
1921

IGDRASIL

By ROYALL SNOW



THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY

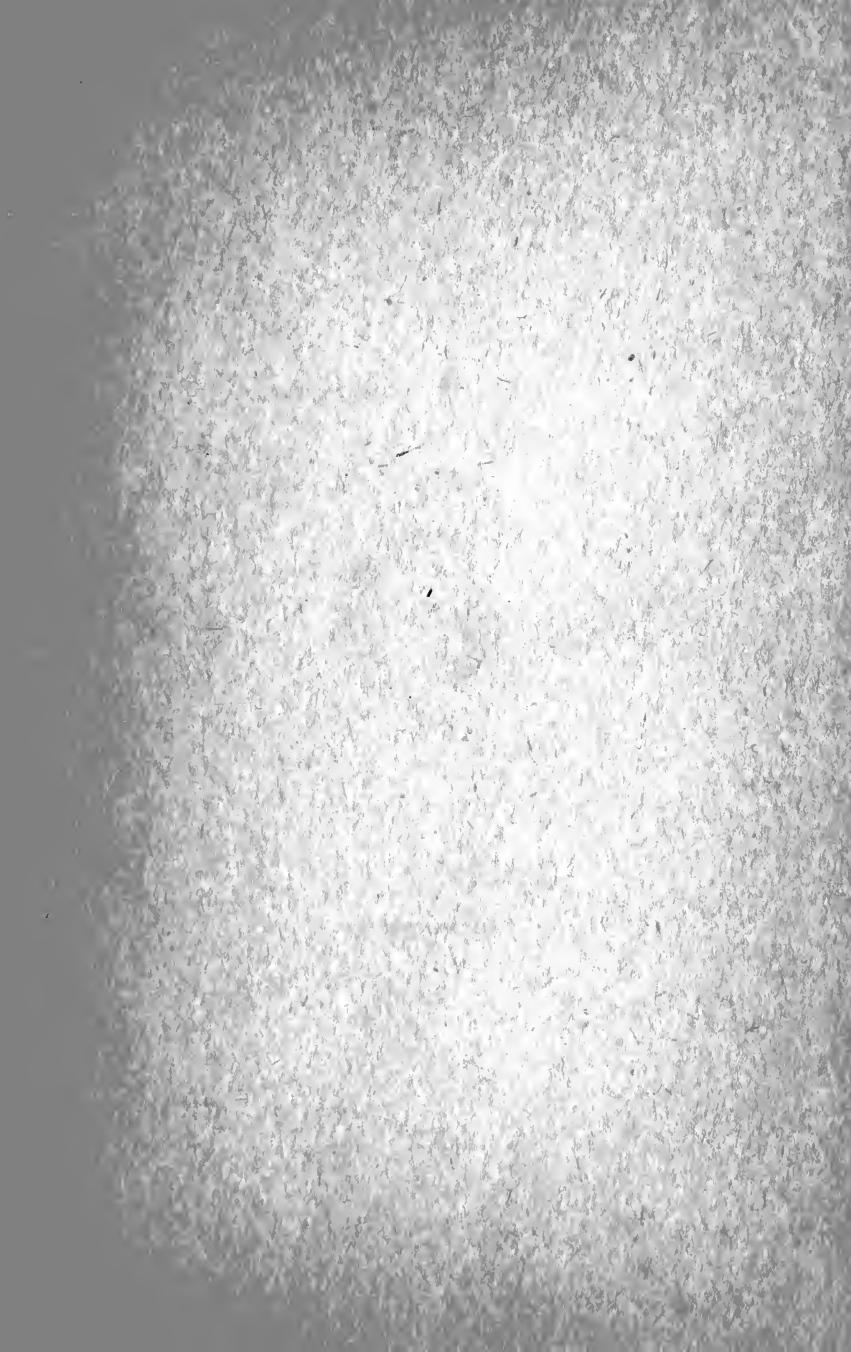


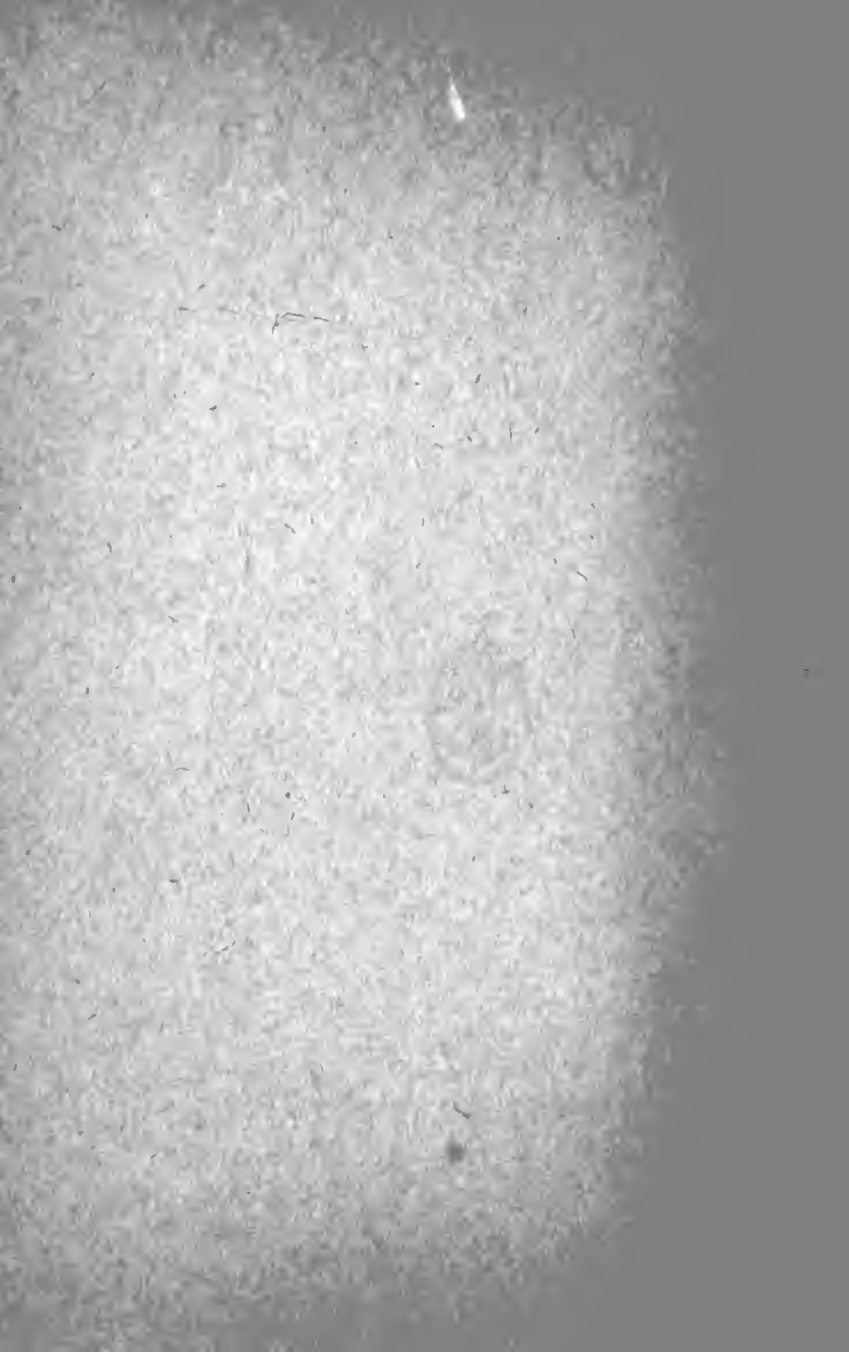
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IGDRASIL

BY

ROYALL SNOW



BOSTON
THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY
1921

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For permission to reprint many of these poems, thanks are due to the editors of "The Stratford Journal," "Pagan," "Queen's Quarterly," "Youth: Poetry of Today," "Contemporary Verse," "Slate" and "Art and Archaeology."

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FOREWORD

Poetry, like the tree Igdrasil, has deep, down-thrusting roots in the underlying kingdoms of the world,—roots that are watered by the Norn of the Past as well as by the Norns of the Present and the Future. In the long run this holds true of both the manner and substance of poetry, and it is a consciousness of that fact which has dictated the form of many of the poems in this volume,—even of those which may seem the most radical technically: the sonnets in free verse. Free verse, which has by now established itself as a legitimate form, has broken up the rhythms of English poetry which were becoming crystallized and mechanical. It has given a new vitality and a new flexibility. But, for the present, experiment has been pushed as far as it safely may be. It is time now to consolidate the gains.

The rhythmical flexibility of free verse was purchased at the cost of melody (not a fundamental but certainly an embellishment of poetry) but there is no reason why, now that the liberty of rhythm has been attained, some of the old Tennysonian melody should not be restored. Rhyme, the most effective of the melodic devices, has never been forbidden by the theory

FOREWORD

of free verse but in practice it has been very rare, and the recent use of it by more than one poet represents unadmitted, though wise, reaction. In certain poems of this volume, such as "Reverie at Twilight" and "Passersby", the attempt to reconcile the elasticity of the new and the melody of the old poetry is both conscious and confessed.

The sonnets in free verse to which I previously alluded are another effort in the same direction. To those people who believe it is the fourteen pentameter lines following a certain rhyme scheme which make the sonnet, these poems will not be sonnets at all. To others who feel that a balancing of thought between the octave and sextet is the essence of the sonnet, they will seem legitimate. They may be explained as an attempt to retain the melodic value of the original while following out the free verse principle of flexible, rather than crystallized and meaningless form.

ROYALL SNOW

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SONGS OF THE GOLD-TIPPED ARROW

CYCLE

Twass centuries ago as twilight fell
Like gauze across the pool
That Radha bathed,
With cool water clinging to her thighs
And silver ripples murmuring.
Twass centuries ago that Krishna watched
Her draw her hair across her curving shoulder
And wring it till there flowed
A river of pearls.
And ages long before
Had Eve, with white body unclothed,
Pressed through the woodbine
Seeking out Adam in the mellowed shadows of the
 birch-groves
To whisper of a new mysterious urging.

Twass centuries ago . . .

EVENSONG

Twilight is drooping like a veil
Upon the curving breast of earth
And beyond the trees is hanging, pale,
A single star as liquid as a tear.
The dusk is heavy with a melancholy
Half-subdued,
But sorrow cannot cloak me wholly—
With you so near
And both our far hearts dreaming . . .

Our worded silence is unbroken
As from out the saddened shadows
Come the drifting ghosts of thoughts we might have
spoken
Had we dared,
Of kisses that our lips have never shared.
And so we sit with melancholy near
But take pleasure in the touching of our hands,
And the mingling of our breathing—soft and even—
And the giving of a smile that understands;
And so we sit and so we watch the star
That is hanging like a tear
Against the cheek of heaven,
And we wonder if behind her twilight veil
Earth, too, is dreaming of some untold tale.

FOR ONE GIRL

OLD LOVE

I shall twist a wreath
Out of the wind-washed songs you sang
And place it over the grave
Where your memory lies buried.
And then I shall go out into the world
Pretending that all memory of you is gone,
Shivered off into nothingness like a brittle moonbeam
Shattered against a dark rock;
But it will not avail
For I shall still feel
Little ghost-fingers clutching at my heart.

SPOILIATION

I let you shake my soul
(Like a flowering cherry tree)
Scattering pink blossoms about you,
And still I try to shade you
 With gaunt boughs.
Now that you have taken all my flowers
Can you not stop and smile
 Only a moment,—
Instead of passing on so quickly to the next tree that
 blooms?

NIGHTFALL

On an emerald evening let me die
With a single sapphire in the sky
 To mark the coming of the night.

Then, from across enchanted water,
Let the song of a prince's daughter
 Call my spirit from its flight

To watch her comb her sunbeam hair
With a comb of carven jade in the flare
 Of a wavering orange candlelight.

Then shall I change to a breeze that lingers,
Touching her lips with fragile fingers,
 As I pass content to the shadowed night.

CYPRIENNE

Save for one clear thought of you
My memory has been
All blurred and shadow-tangled:
Like some Chinese vale the evening dims
Where only a lonely pagoda
Glitters in the moonlight.

And silence blew its liliated breath
Upon the place for three whole years
Until one night I heard the temple gong ring out
With the pent melody of my desire;
And then I knew I must go silently
To worship in that flower-haunted place.

THE GIRL GIVES HER FIRST KISS

They wandered up a lane
Between the lilacs in the twilight
And at a white-paled gate she offered him her hand.
Surprised, she found his arms about her
And the dusk turned swiftly luminous.
In her eyes was wonderment,
Even as Eve, plucking the first flower,
Marvelled at sweetness.

RHAPSODY FOR A GIRL

Words, foamy-crested and plunging with passion,
Flatten as wind-beaten waves
Into a hurry of smooth silent water.

Your kisses are the winds
Beating down the crests of passionate words.
They leave us rocking upon the slow swells of silence.
Your eyes are caverns untroubled with sound:
Caverns where reflections of stars
Creep in to shiver against dark pools.
In the hovering shapes that curl within them
I see the phantom deeds of my future portrayed.

We have journeyed beyond words;
Yet I would murmur
Of the peony-fragrance of your breasts,
Of other things . . .
Words flatten as wind-beaten waves
Under the kisses of your lips.

THE SAME PLACE: LATER

(Sonnet in Free Verse)

Upon the sharp sea rocks our pledge
That love should never end was made,
And then at our feet the swift winds played
A thunderous music on the fanged reef-edge.
And as we picked, that night,
One steady star for symbol of a love that could not die,
The wet cliffs back to the studded sky
Shot a white flare of triumphant light.

And now, alone and silent, I have come
Here where we together used to lie:
The ocean has no word for me,
The granite rocks are dumb.
Only a heavy star slides down the sky
To vanish in the sea.

A TRAGIC NOCTURNE

It is terrible
Out in some moonlit garden
To tread with dainty steps across red petals,
Crushing their stains into the green grass.

The suave grace
Of winds is on the place:
Slenderly indifferent over the trodden petals.

But still more terrible it is
To watch the moonlight on the face
Of one you might have loved,
And (studied in your carelessness)
To laugh back flippant words
Like those that kept yourself from loving . . .
Then to take her arm,
Stepping up a marble stair
Into a flare of Chinese lanterns, music, and of pain!

You would turn back . . .
And yet behind there lie
Only the trodden petals
And the suave grace
Of winds about the place.

REVERIE AT TWILIGHT

The past is shadowy with mist
And mellowed recollections fade;
Memories may hauntingly persist
As candles in the dusk, only to gutter out
Finished as a melody that's played
And the last chord echoed out . . .
Echoed out till only hollow emptiness is left about!

Vivid sunlight and crimson ivy leaf
In a flood of scarlet on gray stone chapel walls:
With a gust of autumn wind the ivy falls
And the dusk is frosted delicately with grief.

And there are old desires like cold fires dying,
The embers fade, no man remembers . . .
In spring the moon-drenched wind goes sighing
Past the lilac-scented trysting places
Emptied of the old lovers, lo, these many years.
The air is heavy with the sadness of forgotten faces
And the wind seems moist with tears.

And then the sounds of laughter come
And a murmuring of words.
Arm in arm two lovers pass:
A moment of tinkling laughter, emptiness afterwards,
Save for the idle shadows on the grass
And the unseen ghosts that are dumb.

Who can speak the names that chime
Like the echos of a bell
Recurring from an ancient time
To break the wizard years slow spell?
What magic bring to these mellow places
The long-forgotten faces?
The heavy wind goes weeping
Off to distant skies
And the dark comes slowly creeping
Around each deserted nest,
Each colored autumn leaf.

The twilight dies
As unseen ghosts stir in a long unrest,
And the night is frosted delicately with grief.



FANTASTICA AND FACT



AN OLD OLD STORY

Pierre was lonely
As the heart of some stone god
Buried in a spulchral vault.
He looked at the sun, mouldering
In the grey mud of the skies
And felt his own heart mouldering.
La Patrie had called and he was answering
With a mouldering heart!
With sick blood that dripped through his veins
Like rain!
At the station were sweethearts
Saying good-bye,—and he was alone,
Alone and drifting through a dreary slough of faces.
Someone touched him; he turned.
“Pierre!” she said . . .

And now he was riding north
Through fields that stretched out
Like the petals of a sun-flower.
And there was a flower hidden near his heart:
A flower he had stolen from her hair
To be the mate of the kiss he had from her lips.
There were flowers sprung
Out of the mould in his heart:
Flowers that stroked his soul with cool
Petal-fingers.
Pierre was glad;
Smoke flowers burst out of the engine
And wreathed the train

That swept him to the battle field.
The road over which he marched
Was the stem to a red flower
That hummed with the distant roar of many bees.
Pierre was glad
And so with fierce joy
He tossed at the enemy, bouquets
Of little flame flowers that vanished quickly
From their smoking stem.
Pierre carried her flower over his heart
So that he was glad when the keen tongues
Of the trumpets,
Like the stamen of brazen lilies,
Sounded, "Charge!" . . .

And Pierre still wore a smile,
A little frozen-flower smile,
As the sun sank like a wilting poppy,
And the moon came up: a great white lily.

HE LEFT HARVARD FOR THE WAR

Two autumns he had seen the ivy blush
Against the gray stone chapel walls
And twice in spring had watched the lilacs brush
The red-brick college halls.

Carelessly he loitered with the rest
On Seaver's steps before the gong,
Mingling with talk of lectures or a test
Stray comment on a dance or song.

And thus his final moment there was spent
For Harvard taught his heart
How it might always seem indifferent,
Yet how might do its part;

And Harvard still, with ever-open doors,
As she has always done, will teach
New men to chat of games and go to wars
With the same old smile for each.

CONCERNING THE EGO

I. THE PEARL-DIVER

I plunge,
A sharp streak of bronze,
Through the sea-green chaos of my mind
To discover deep-drowned pearls.

II. ON A TRAIN

My heart is a tiger lily
Of fire blossoming;
It holds up the wavering cup
Of its golden eagerness
To the stars
Of an opening future.

And yet I am burned with it;
Years will pass before I see again
The tasselled cornfields of my native state.

BEACON

Fierce night, white night,
Burn like a beacon
On the grey hills of memory!
Twist up the oaken boughs
Of wrath.

Feed the flames with them.
Let the wind of new thoughts
Beat the fire to brilliance,
The edge of new friendship
Slice the darkness with light.

Fierce night, white night,
Burn like a beacon
On the grey hills of memory!

SUMMER PHANTASY

Up over the rim of a world
Heavy-lidded with heat
In crystalline days by the seashore
I walk arcaded verandahs
And watch children playing below.
A tanned little girl in pink and a boy in brown,
Fresh from the foam-edged sands and glittering water,
Play now with balloons
On lawns about creamy hydrangeas;
Down the curved street under the shade-trees
The singing of a vender's horn trickles gladly,
Calling a musical farewell
To the gay-colored balloons left behind:
Even as some day this song
Shall wind back clearly to crystalline days
When I am down over the rim of the world
Heavy-lidded with heat.

CONCERNING THE PYROTECHNICS OF EMOTION

(Sonnet in Free Verse)

We have too much of dramatics
And paraded passions that are lusty;
Those old emotions are as dusty
As long-deserted attics.
And Melisandes with flowing hair
Cascading from a balcony
Seem all false to me,—
Let us have healthy hearts and fresher air!

You'll find your true emotion like a nun
Walking somberly in gray;
There will be no fine speeches spun,
No grandiose display.
A lad will press a young girl's hand
And simplicity will make them grand.

FOR THE MADONNA DI SANTA CHIARA

(Sonnet in Free Verse)

Your girlish face is somberly impressed
With an apocalyptic glory;
It is enriched by faith in that great story
Of God within your child made manifest.
And yet the word religion cannot embrace
All the loveliness that hangs about
Your countenance devout
For your beauty has a subtly human grace.

Gentle Mary, on your face
There is a lovely lingering light of wonderment
For the child against your breast,
And yet your cool, cool eyes bear not the trace
Of kisses fierce and turbulent:
They have the unplumbed cleanness of the uncaressed.

CELIBACY

He had lived a life
Virtuous as the coldness
Of marble statues;
Yet he went mad,
Crying that he saw the ghost of a child
Dancing upon the sword-points
Of the fir-tree tops.

TRUTH

She had told him that she did not love him.
The laugh which he dropped scornfully at her feet
Was brittle
So that it snapped and cracked
In many places.
If she had lied, saying
That her life was a broken flute without him,
He would have kissed her,
And believed.

HUMOURISTS

Stalking down stone corridors,
Armored as old knights
Walking on crenelated walls
In safety,
Come the old gods
Blurred in misty ages
Of whispered talk ;
And come also the new spectres :
Evolution, Heredity, Fatalistic Psychology.
Walking in safety on crenelated battlements
They scatter laughter, crisp
As the shatter of icicles,
Over humanity.
And the unwise wisemen
Besiege the walls unavailingly.

But somewhere on a country road a small boy
Snubs his bare toes in the powdery dust,
And watches a robin
Pull worms from the fresh loam of a ploughed field.
He grins too :

So on whom is the joke?

EXISTENCE

The notes

Of the distant

Piano

Were as butterflies in a far field:

One I caught

As a thousand drifted palely away.

And so with the world that whirls past:

Rich lips in a subway; a laugh

That trickles through a dark theater;

Black hair loose on white shoulders

While a shade is being drawn.

Meanwhile the dust rubs from the wings

Of the butterfly I have caught

And the others are flown.

THE ADVENTURER

(And the rest of mankind)

A flock of swallows whirl
And swoop
Hunting for their food
In a dusk that gathers fast.

While high above,
To reach the island of a cloud,
A hawk
Goes swimming up the scarlet waters
Of the setting sun.

THE STREET SINGER

You have stumbled upon the edge of happiness
And not been wise enough to see it,
For your eyes are clouded
And hunger undertones with bitterness your song.
Only but watch yourself
And the secret dreamers long have sought
Is yours:
The keeping of a song upon the lips
In the search for bread.

HUMANITY

An infinitely good-natured newfoundland puppy
Perpetually stepping with clumsy feet
On the edges of academic saucers
And upsetting the milk over neat carpets!

A puppy continually circling after its own tail
And snapping at sunlight,
Basking in hot streets,
And getting its paw run over
By elemental motor trucks.

A poor devil of a puppy
Staring, half-intelligent,
Out of great hungry eyes.

CITY SKETCHES

I. FLIRTATION

Sluggishly the city
Draws her head back of a fan of night mists
To hide her yawns, while with her thousand eyes
She coquettes lazily with the river.

II. LESE MAJESTE

Somewhere off in the distance
A playful church spire sticks the full moon in the ribs,
And sends it spluttering indignantly across the sky
Like a stout burgher.

III. GOSSIP

One tall building,
Its base entangled in a cluster of squatty ones
Like a pencil stuck in a jar of peas,
Stares superciliously about;
The short buildings pretend scorn
And whisper catty things with their rattling window-
panes.

IV. VISTA

Across the river
The city makes a purple bas relief
Against an orange west.

V. GROTESQUE

They built that house of orange stucco
And gave it greenish blinds for eyelids
Either side the nose-like door.
It's a hobgoblin, halloween face
And it winks over the street at a church.

Heigh-ho, but the spinster church
Is very proper!
See her gather the trees
Like skirts about her,
And pretend to see only the stars!

VI. CORNER ROMANCE

His soul was like a trolley car:
Jolly, rumbling,
And eminently practical.
Hers was a little pool of water that reflected the stars.
And then one day his soul came clattering down the
street
And ran over hers.
Now hers reflects the stars no more
For his stirred up all the mud beneath.

PASSERSBY

I saw Helen of Troy
Walking along a dirty street.
She wore shoddy clothes
And broken shoes were on her feet
While with her walked a sallow boy.

The lyric seems to die in prose
When, in place of Helen, Paris, and their noble kind,
Simply a pimpled youth in dirty linen
Goes with a girl to find
A furnished room to sin in.

And yet I still profess,
However base this woman is,
There was something of Helen with the other
Hidden in that shoddy dress,
For I saw this girl's dark eyes burn luminous
With looking on her lover.

IN A SECLUDED STUDY

The log fire
Is infinitely tender.
It combs the dark with smooth fingers of light,
It tries to warm the cold night
With soft kisses,
And when the night does not respond
It dies.

METAMORPHOSIS: CITY AT TWILIGHT

Lethargic in the dusk the city lies
As languid as a late and melting snow;
Tired it is from varied enterprise
And like a sleeping child is resting now.
Its angles in the honied, hazy glow
Are softened sweetly and the twilight's gray
Comes as a lullaby to soothe it so
To quiet from the uproar of the day.
For metamorphosis has worked its way
And changed, as half-lights mystically reveal,
From noisy wrath and dirty disarray
This giant, granite-fleshed and ribbed with steel
It is, with hills to pillow its unrest,
Become a waif asleep against a kindly breast.

MELLOW WEATHER

The day is sweet
As pears grown ripe in August sun
And the light slips honey-warm
And fluid through the leaves.
The mellowness of things long-done
Through every gleam and shadow breathes,—
That calmness of a world complete
And full endowed with loveliness before
Man's feet had crossed the threshold of Creation's
door.

And so all stir sinks down to rest
In quiet at the touch of things
Whose beauty, immemorial, has blest
The kingdoms of a thousand kings.
And trouble has no edge of pain
For us, exiled from the eternal plane,
Who now can glimpse its calm again.

AFTER THE STORM: EARLY EVENING

(Sonnet in Free Verse)

The storm past, I walk through the leaves
That cling damply to my feet,
And rejoice that nature is complete
Without a mind that grieves
For spring thus faded to an autumn's end.
Nature is dead, and yet it seems
Alive as vividly as many dreams:
I wonder, is it a symbol or a friend?

The trees are sharp black
In the luminous air
That follows after rain.
Hearts too, I know, may sometimes after pain
Find that a numbed quiet creeps back—
Satin against a wound left bare.

NOVEMBER NIGHT

(Sonnet in Free Verse)

The night is ill at ease
Spangled with its stars of flaky steel,
Astir with winds that break and wheel
Like flocks of birds above the trees.
Then quiet brings a restless pause
To brood, sullenly disturbed,
Over an earth for ages curbed
With the ponderous weight of ancient laws.

The facile wind, the tinsel of the stars
Are as the smile that covereth
A sad heart at festivities.
They are the glitter of the thin guitars
Above the heavy orchestra of death,
Above the frozen earth, the naked trees.

QUIET AFTER SNOWFALL

The trees like spectre birds of paradise
Pose in a world of gray and white,
And the ghosts of faded shadows
Lie upon the ground.
Come, let us climb a hill together
With the moon for lanthorn
And from the crest behold the world,
A white illusion at our feet.

NIGHT RAIN

Down comes the rain, creeping, afraid:
Not with the shatter of lances
Storms bring
But only a long slinking.

Under the wind trees bow down in fear
And rows of beaten houses huddle together.

Now they stand proud in undefeated courage;
Off the slate roofs arc-light rays glance
As from steel helmets,
And trees shake proudly, indolently as the manes of
coursers.

The rain creeps along slinking.

CITY STREETS

Oh, I have kissed emptiness
And loved this shadow that has lost its soul!
I am sick with the despair of it.

From resonance my heart has suddenly gone dead
Like an echoing gong
Touched by a cold finger.

From this place are my friends gone,
From this place I loved;
And I see now that I loved its soul,
Not the beautiful body . . .
Like a woman this city stands
Beautiful still, tangling
The gems of stars in her elm-tresses
And girdled with her jewelled streets.

But now at the sight of her I sicken,
I, who hunger for her lost soul.

DEAD FOUNTAINS

Moonstains on a leafstrewn cloister walk
And through the colonnades, dead fountains, rain-filled,
Cast upward hollow echos of the stars.

Moonlight tinselling a girl's black hair
As a light step crinkles through the leaves:

"Paolo? Paolo?"

The dry rustlings of the leaves
Blur out the whisperings of two,
Wrap silk around the sound of kisses.

Moonlight streaming in silver
Along rapier blades . . .

Heavy feet scatter leaves
Into frightened leaps.

Twice a curse!

Then the moan of a man
Lying, pale head in the light,
Body in shadow.

"Paolo, Paolo! Help!"

The cry of a girl totters against the colonnades
And falls across dead fountains
That cast upward hollow echoes of the stars.

A VISION OF DEAD LADIES

I rested on an evening, murmurous
And heavy with the scent of heat-enshrouded flowers:
A full rose broke and streamed
Its petals, white across the grass,
And gold-fish stirred beside me as I lay;
To my eyes grown drowsy in the dark
The touches of soft gold their moving made
Seemed as flicks of light on rich brocade;
The water whispers turned to voices murmuring.

Helen came,
And Cleopatra
Hot summer-lipped and without shame,
And white girls snowy as their native north,
And earth brown maidens that the East brought forth
In far Lahore, in Burma, or Sumatra.

Each passed alone and each was singing
A melody that softly swinging came to me.

"Our vanished lips have found rebirth
In the curving of a rose,
Our breasts have mellowed in the earth
To clover feeding slender does.

"But yet against our curving breasts
We feel no baby's mouth;
Our eager lips, all uncaressed
By lovers, parch in a long love-drouth.

"Vain is the glory of the rose
And vain the sweetness of the clover
To her who dead no longer knows
The sweetness of her lover."

Brief glimpse of women glorious
And then a couple passed
Unconscious of me lying there.
The silent singing was overcast
By the murmur of their voices on the evening air;
Dead queens slipped back into the dark abyss
To the music of a living lover's kiss . . .

Dead Guinevere and passion-pained Iseult,
Sleep well within your grave!
Your lovers came, your lovers gave
Kisses to your red lips,
Kisses to make your proud hearts exult
In the starred nights of the dead years.

Sleep well within your grave
And leave the earth to those who follow after,
To maidens bringing their red lips
And soft laughter,
Their kisses and their love-born tears
To young men who await them in the moonlight,
Eager as poised hawks, tender as the Angelus bell.

Dead Guinevere, O Iseult of Ireland,
I pay you homage,
And say farewell.

SALOME AND HEROD

A wavering flash of fire
In heavy eyes, somber and dark,—
Like to a spark
In black forests
Is that light in her eyes.
The forest is kindled, the fire
Weaves in a passionate bacchanal
Around the black boles of the trees.

Lips sultry with passion, cheeks pale,
Salome dances.
Through the mist of her hair and the veils
Arms shift and glide
As serpents of silver through water.
Her body is rose seen through amber;
Her feet in their golden sandals
Are white birds in the ripening wheat.

Swift on the feast table Salome dances.
Wine stains her feet;
Her ankles are tangled with orchids;
Cascading in jet on ruby-flushed shoulders
Falls Salome's hair as she dances.

A trumpet screams;
Salome leaps, then pauses
Erect in the wreck of the feast:
An ivory demon, triumphant,
Awaiting her reward.

Blood upon silver, they bear it!
Shaggy locks tangled, thick lips closed,
In a pool of blood on a silver platter,
The head of the prophet!

From the coldness of death
Lips that had cursed her in life
Grow warm with Salome's kisses.
Head flung back, hair like a thunder-cloud tumbling,
She kisses the lips of the dead.
Blood wets her lips; it drops on her breast,
A spatter of red on lilies.

Then Herod cries out in his wrath and his shame,
And his warriors come,
And tumult breaks like a flame:
A crash of shields, a cry of pain,
Orchids and girl and blood and wine
Are crushed together in a stain
On the great white marble stair.
Herod flees, the torches flare,
Only the moon is left to stare.

KRISHNA'S FLUTE

"Krishna bewilders and beguiles all hearts by the playing of his magic flute . . . He is the Pied Piper of the soul and the children of men who hear his piping follow him through the forests and away to perfect freedom."—*Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*.

Beneath the moon there floats a tune
Restless with immortal fire.
Faded is the sound of laughter
And the lips of men are mute
For the night is mellow with a sung desire
As Krishna passes with his flute . . .
Some are wise and follow after.

But haughty princes lie, indifferent
In gardens fragrant with the scent
Of flowers and of ripened fruit.
The sound of Krishna's flute
Is drowned in tambourines' swift ringing
And girls shift as fire
In a dance
At which the princes, numb with satiate desire,
Indolently glance.
They grow weary of the singing;
Their very jewels turn to flame
And sear their flesh with pain . . .

But the madness of immortal melodies
Quivers like light about the trees

In those dim forests of the soul
Where Krishna passes piping.
The terror of the forest dies
Beneath the song-lit skies,
And pilgrims find their feet are light
On the pathways of the night.

OMAR'S GRAVE

"My tomb shall be in a spot where the North wind may scatter roses over it." — *Omar Khayyam*.

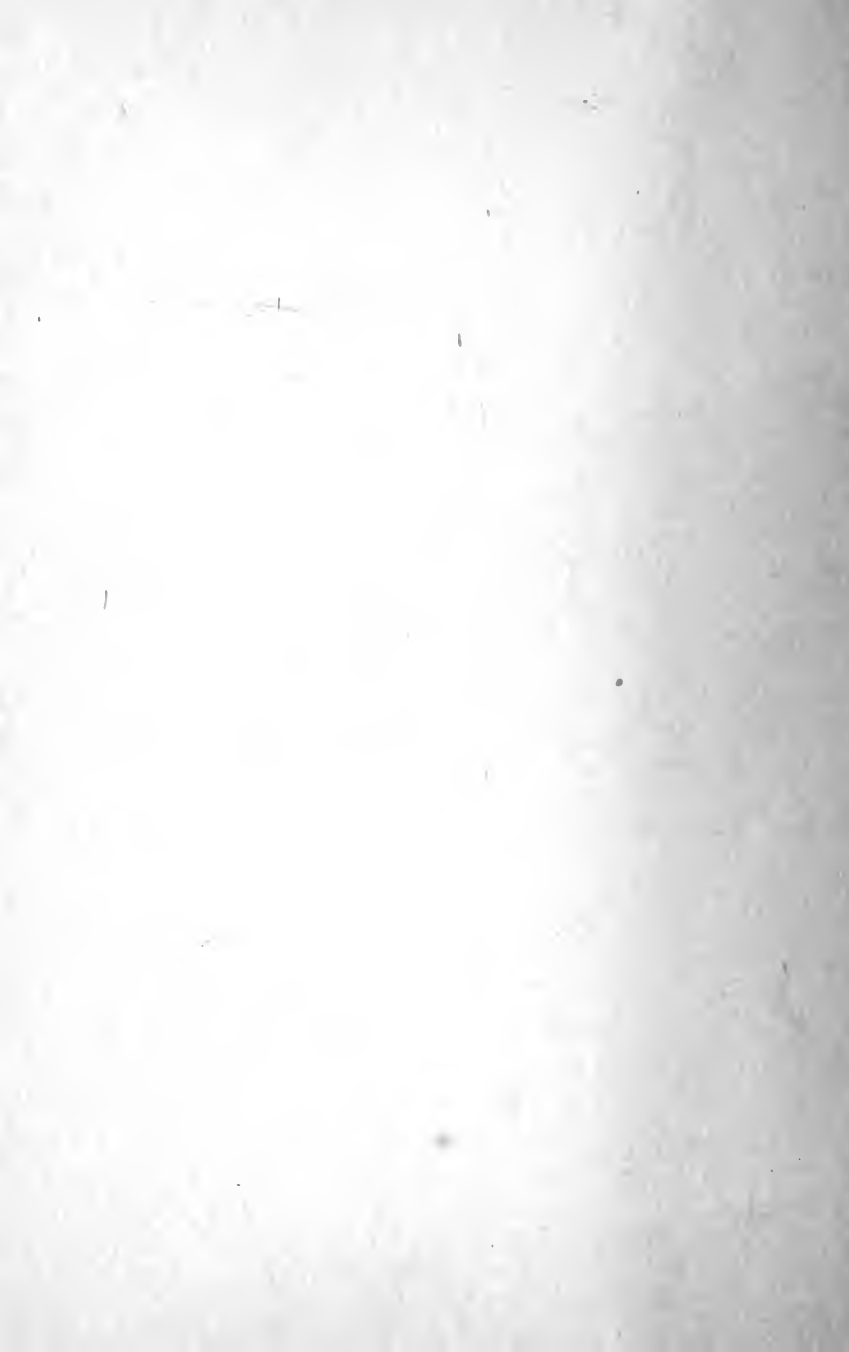
Omar, sick with melancholia
And fumes of rose-drugged wine,
Saw glory in the earth and prayed the grave
Might have its chill made warm
By broken roses.

And the years dimmed as red reflections
In a wine cup pale
When candles gutter out,
And scholars mourned at destiny
In Omar dead.

From Cairo far across Arabia to Nishapur
There came one man in loneliness to grieve,
And found the cool-handed wind of Persia shook
Loose roses in a wreck of white and red
Across the grill work of a garden wall
On Omar's grave.

"And lo," the old man said,
"The rose of song has faded,
The roses of the earth still fade."

BEYOND REALITY



THE JOURNAL OF A SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE

Brooding the impalpable great things
Of life this Milo Venus stands, serene where kings
Would tremble, and peering with her quiet eyes
Into the hidden realm where true life lies,
The empery of beauty and of thought.
And so the wars which emperors have fought
Have been but phantom to her eye that sees
Beyond the flesh to the realities.
Greece fell and Rome decayed; new nations built
Upon their ruin as upon the silt
Of deltaed rivers and of washing tides
Grow to a vigorous life new countrysides.
And all this time, amidst a world's decay,
That Venus stood, aloof from all dismay
As some cathedral spire which lifts its high
And still unsullied beauty to the sky
While wars gut out the city down below,
Its people perish, buildings fall, and the slow
But universal grasses creep again
Along the streets once trod to rock by men.

And now I ask you why we write. Is Art,
Abstracted, still so fine a thing our heart
Torn burning out, is suited sacrifice
To lay upon its altar? Is it for this,
A word which we make God, that we shall tell
Our intimate desires or plunge in Hell
Tempering our souls to make more fine

The thought that beats pulsating through each line?
It is not for that I write. I am afraid
Of the great fingers of the dark which made
This earth and blackly compass it. To die
And then sweep out into the hollow sky
On gusty winds and be engulfed in space
Is terrible! I have not strength to face
The empty distances of death alone
And were I dead my soul, turned chill as stone,
Would tremble back from them and linger here
Enchained to earth by the bondage of its fear:
A thing afraid of heaven and not of the earth.
And so I seek in a remembered name rebirth—
A life within my poems, for the spoken breath
That brings one line to life will conquer death.

Alas, like bronze in strength and rich as gold
Must be that poem which can hope to hold
Its lustre brilliant through the acid years.
A test impossible! I see my fears
Cloud around me like the ghosts that form in smoke:
What hand that ever carved, what voice that spoke,
Can so endure! What madness is this in me
To trust to verse like mine!

And then I turn and see
This ageless Venus! And I ask what is known
Of the man that brought this woman from the stone
To outlast empires. In Salamis he lived,
Or on the isle where Ariadne grieved
Her faithless Theseus perhaps, or else

Where crumbling Syracuse still melts
Reflections in the blue Sicilian sea.
Imperial Athens or some colony
It may be cradled him and trained his eyes
To beauty under clear Ionian skies.

He must have loved some woman in those days
He walked an earth all luminous with that haze
Of gold which hangs above the hills in spring.
And in the moonlight he would come and sing
Outside her window. Burning with her kiss
He would turn with sublimated artifice
To work its magic in the virgin stone.
So it must have been and yet no one
Remembers it and not a book records
His actions even in a few small words.
His life is forgotten and his very name
Is gone into that Time from which it came.

And here am I who scribble lines and strive
By them to keep my memory alive;
And here (more subtly wrought, more nobly planned
Than any work to which I have dared set hand)
There stands this woman with her eyes that see
Beyond my struggles to eternity.
Serenity is hers, the calm that broods
Austerely beautiful through sacramental moods;
Yet he who touched her limbs with life is dead,
Forgotten utterly in the long years that are fled.

Oh thought as bitter to the lips as ashes are!
That even he is gone, engulfed, a fallen star!

Does life but blossom that a winter gale
May come ironically and shake its frail
Dead petals down upon the frosty ground?
Is it for nothing philosophers propound
Their truths and scientists make war upon
The dark unknown battalions that surround
Our living? For nothing saints have undergone
Affliction? Great and small alike, all must
Irrevocably be forgotten dust?

Better to die at once and thus go out.
To stand defiant on a cliff and shout
Derision at those ancient gods who make
Of life but a flame and tortured martyr-stake,
Fling scorn to scorn, then leap into the foam
And in the ocean find an endless home!

But there is still this Venus here to say
With wordless lips that there may be today
A world which seems a meaningless confusion,
And yet tomorrow only the illusion
Of her beauty lives. For she is not
A thing of marble but illusion wrought
In marble, and it is that which lives in her;
All things but this have found a sepulchre.
Dynasties may fall but beauty reigns
In an eternal kingdom. And she retains
Her beauty;—mangled, she is still serene
For all the cataclysms she has seen.

Then in this flux of life and death and chance
There is at least in beauty permanence,

Secure although the tides flow in or out
Eddying with the currents of our doubt.
It is true we are forgotten and the shell
Of us is swept to sea on a tidal swell,
But what we have built of beauty in our heart
May still endure and still exist apart.
That is not us and yet it is the best
Of us, and brings the wonder: can the rest
(That sum of our peculiarities)
Be nothing after all but a disease
And breeder of unrest? Then better blend
Outside of life with that which can transcend
The hungry treachery of time, and merge,
With self abandoned, in the palpitant surge
Of that Beauty which to human eyes is known
But by its symbols, like this Venus carved in stone.

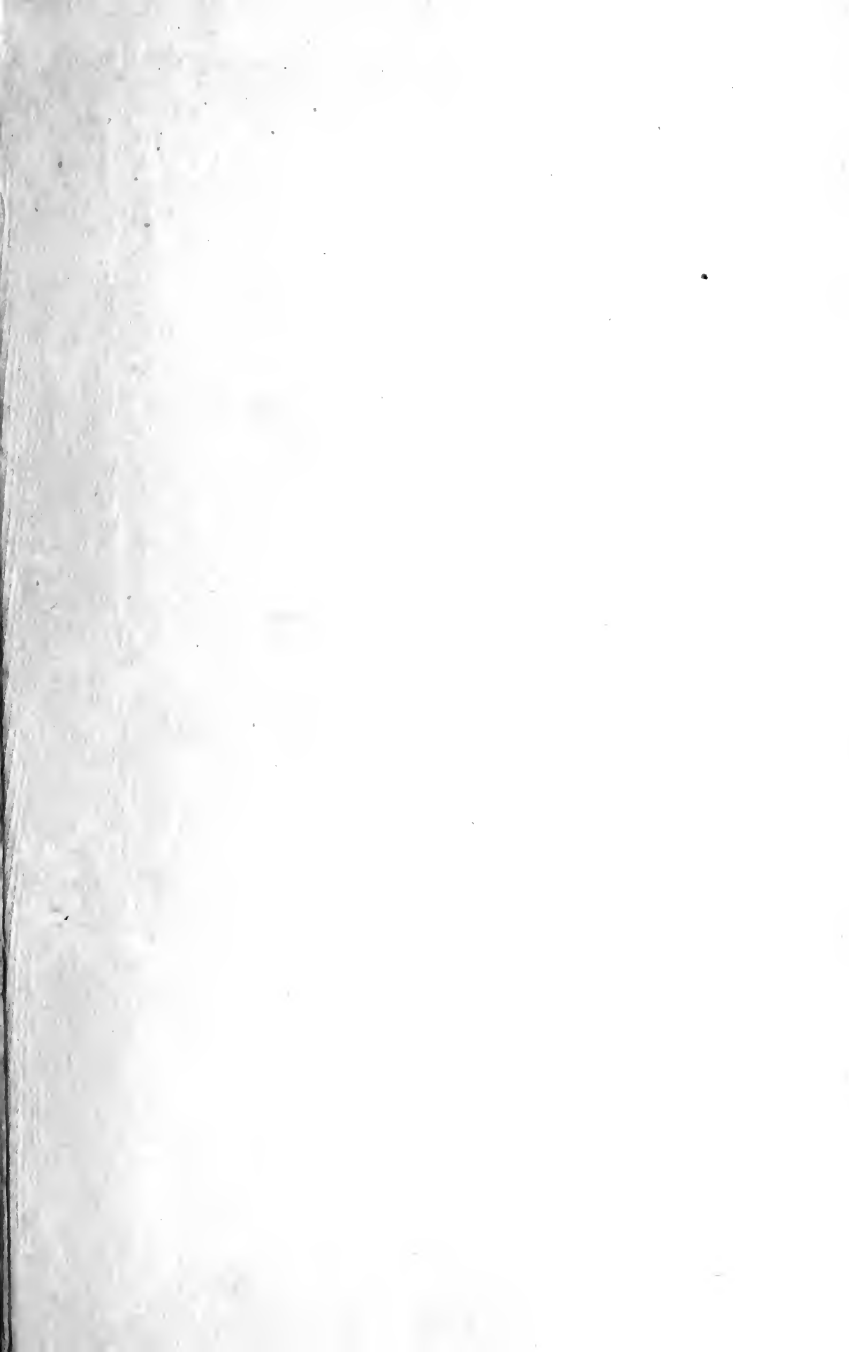
How near this Venus grows! She stood withdrawn
Before from all my pettiness and on
Serener things she looked, but now instead
With quiet friendliness she bends her head
To smile at me. What comfort there would be
To creep up and rest against her knee
Contented as a tired child at last
Come home. Changed, this goddess of the past
Is turned to woman and the one to lull
Asleep the frightened child, as beautiful,
She stands beside him for his surety
That he may sleep but beauty will not cease to be.



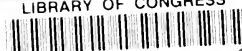
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